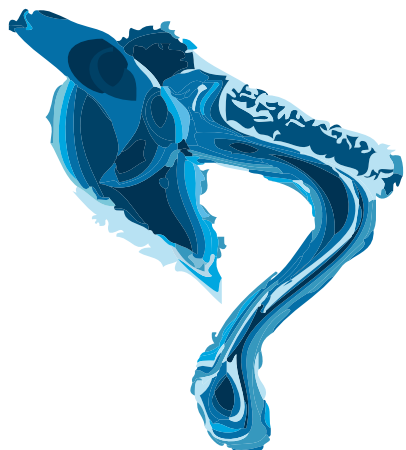


ELECTORAL STUDIES IN COMPARED INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE



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Voting from Abroad in 18 Latin American Countries

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VOTING FROM ABROAD IN

18 LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES

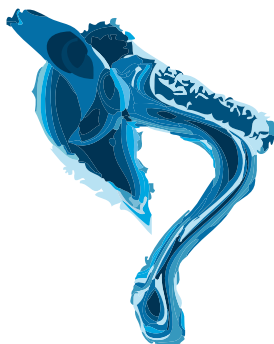
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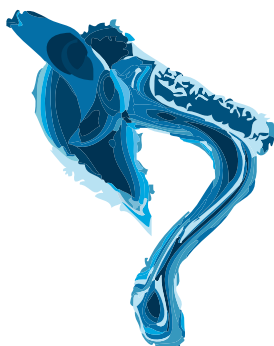
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FOREWORD

Migration is one of the international phenomena that worries both authorities and scholars of the immense majority of our nations the most. The inequality that characterises modern societies, the lack of opportunities and even insecurity are some of the factors that have greatly contributed to migration flows being analysed from different perspectives and for its repercussions to reach multiple spheres of the public life. One of such spheres where migration has consequences is democratic life.

Even when the content of the International Bill of Human Rights clearly established that political rights are part of the set of inalienable rights enjoyed by all the people in the world, the truth is that their exercise has been conditioned to the evolution of the democratic system of each country. In fact, if we review the conceptualisation of the transition processes into democracy, which were at their height in the last two decades of the past century, it is evident that the regulations to guarantee the exercise of political rights (to vote and to stand for public office) have been modelled according to each nation's concerns and priorities.

I will illustrate the aforesaid with the Mexican case.

At the end of the 80s, in the context of our country, it was essential to guarantee, at first, the universalisation of the suffrage within the national territory, the credibility of the electoral authorities and the authenticity of the contests. Otherwise said, the electoral machinery had to provide juridical certainty to the electoral contest, without arbitrariness and with strict abidance to the law, through verifiable procedures. New rules were designed for the democratic competition, robust procedures were legislated for each one of the stages of the electoral processes, and the electoral authorities, administrative and jurisdictional, were transformed. That is, priority was given to the contest for political power on unequivocal bases before opening the spaces for the suffrage of our fellow citizens residing abroad.



The last decade of the 20th century ended with these concerns, and elections became a natural part of Mexico's political life, as, in general, of Latin America's. It could be said that during the 90s, voting strengthened itself as an efficient tool to affect public life and to reorient the political regimes through electoral means around the world. Throughout that decade, the Latin American region was being transformed by unceasing and profound social and economic changes generated by informatics and globalisation.

Mexico was no stranger to the societal and political transformations experienced during this time span of just a decade. The increased competitiveness of the electoral processes inaugurated an era of divided governments, laid the foundations of a new electoral reform and made political pluralism a distinctive feature of the Mexican Congress. It is within this context that conditions were created to open the debate on overseas voting, and in 1999 a committee of experts was put together to study the possibility of Mexicans residing in other countries casting their vote from abroad. The legislators based their analysis on their recommendations, and in 2005, political consensus was achieved for a constitutional amendment to allow Mexicans living outside the country to exercise their basic political rights.

The 2005 reform was of great relevance for the universalisation of the suffrage in the Mexican democracy, since the Mexican State acknowledged that the place of residence cannot be a factor that prevents the exercise of the fundamental rights of people. Postal vote was established in that reform, solely for the election of the President of the Republic, as the most suitable model for voting from abroad in accordance with the Mexican reality of the time. The presidential elections of 2006 and 2012 showed some complications with the postal voting model: there were low levels of registration in the list of residents abroad, insistent demands of migrants and scholars on electoral-political phenomena, and reports and proposals of the electoral authorities and the organizations supporting the causes of Mexican migrants. Everyone agreed on one thing, however: the characteristics involving this model of voting were impractical for the reality of Mexican migration.

These experiences and reflections prompted three pivotal policy changes

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